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It's in the Bible **Chapter 7**

NUDITY AND LUST

When God created Adam and Eve, they were created naked, and they lived that way until after the fall—until after they sinned. We do not know how long they lived in the garden before they sinned and fell. For all we know, it could have been thousands of years. (Genesis says that Adam lived eight hundred years after Seth was born, but the Bible does not say how long he had lived before then.) We dealt with this somewhat in the chapter on the “Knowledge of Good and Evil.” Let’s see specifically what happened.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the Garden.

9 Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”

10 And he said, “I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.”

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11 And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”. . .

22 Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—

23 therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. —Genesis 3

Adam and Eve had evidently been living nude. There was nothing wrong with that, since God certainly did not consider it to be sin. After they ate of the tree of the knowledge and good and evil, they themselves concluded that being naked was wrong. Therefore they made clothes for themselves. It is interesting to note that God never said nudity was wrong. That was their own conclusion.

Following this a step further, we find that God commanded Isaiah the prophet to go naked

for three years:

- 1 In the year that the commander came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him and he fought against Ashdod and captured it,
- 2 at that time the Lord spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, “Go and loosen the sackcloth from your hips, and take your shoes off your feet.” And he did so, going naked and barefoot.
- 3 And the Lord said, “Even as My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot three years as a sign and token against Egypt and Cush,
- 4 so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush,

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young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.
—Isaiah 20

Some might think that God wanted Isaiah to go around in just his underwear, but verse 4 makes it absolutely clear that his buttocks were uncovered. So Isaiah went around totally nude—without even shoes on—for three years, because God commanded him to do this. We know that God would not command anyone to sin. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that nudity is not a sin in God’s eyes. At least it was not a sin for Isaiah; it could be for someone else.

King Saul and the prophet Micah also were nude at times when doing God’s work:

24 And he also stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”
—1 Samuel 19

- 8 Because of this I must lament and wail,
I must go barefoot and naked;
I must make a lament like the jackals
And a mourning like the ostriches. —Micah 1

There is a difference between being nude and being naked, just as there is a difference between being alone and being lonely. Being unclothed, when it is under God’s command or within His will, is not a shameful thing. However, being stripped naked can be a shameful thing. If poor people are naked, we are commanded to clothe them (Isaiah 58:7).

Just as an aside, the phrase “uncover the nakedness” in the Bible is a term for having

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intercourse. It is not referring to nudity. We find this numerous places, such as the following

- 18 ‘And you shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness.
- 19 ‘Also you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her menstrual

impurity’ —Leviticus 18

8 ‘You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness.

9 ‘The nakedness of your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether born at home or born outside, their nakedness you shall not uncover.

10 ‘The nakedness of your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover, for their nakedness is yours.

11 ‘The nakedness of your father’s wife’s daughter, born to your father, she is your sister, you shall not uncover her nakedness . . . —Leviticus 18

We are not dealing here with “uncovering nakedness,” which is a different subject. What we are dealing with in this chapter is nudity totally apart from lust or sex. This would include nudity, such as found in the statue of David or a painting in our national art gallery of “The Three Muses.”

Even though nudity is not a sin, the Bible clearly says that sexual lust is a sin. A glamorous, young, female movie star could walk into a room wearing a gunnysack and men could lust after her. An old, fat, wrinkled woman could walk into that same room with her clothes off and the same men would likely have no lust whatsoever.

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It seems to me that the main problem with nudity is that it could create lust. If it did create lust, then nudity would be wrong. By the same token, wearing skimpy or sexy clothing, if it creates lust, would be equally as wrong. In fact, skimpy and sexy clothing can sometimes create far more lust than total nudity would. It is easy to preach or speak out against nudity. However, what we should be preaching against is lust. Perhaps the reason that some preachers don’t preach against lust as sin is that they might lose half of their congregation.

Lest you misunderstand, I am not advocating everyone taking off his clothes, joining a nudist colony or anything like that. It is just that I cannot find any command in Scriptures that says, “Thou shall not go nude.” On the other hand, I do find a Scripture where God commanded one of his prophets to go nude. Since God commanded it, nudity must not be, in and of itself, inherently sinful.

NUDE IN FRONT OF WHOM, FOR WHAT REASON

Obviously, at times during our lives, people are going to see us without our clothes on. The real question is whether it is ever sin and, if so, when. Since the Bible is silent, man would have to make up his own rules, which could become very complicated.

Most of us have showered with members of the same sex after P.E. class in junior high and high school, or after playing a football game and such. Therefore, let’s exclude being nude in front of members of the same sex as possibly being sin (at least for heterosexuals).

If we conclude that it is a sin to be nude in front of a member of the opposite sex, we run into difficulty in trying to devise our own law. For

example, at what age should a mother stop bathing her son? When he is a tiny infant, it is evidently not sin. But at some point along the way, in some people's thinking, it must begin to be sin. Let us say that occurred when he was ten years old. Does this mean that it was not a sin when he was nine years, eleven months and thirty days old, and then the next day it became sin? The reason that it is stopped at a certain point is usually to avoid potential lust in the future, not because the act of being nude suddenly became sin.

Another example would be a man's aged mother who was sick and totally bedridden. Let's say she needed a bath. Would it be sin for him to give her a bath?

Another question would arise as to whether we should have only women gynecologists. Certainly a male gynecologist not only sees a woman nude, but also touches her in a very intimate way.

What about the women whom the Nazis rounded up to take to concentration camps, who were forced to strip in front of their male guards? Were all of these women sinning?

In my early days, on my grandfather's farm and my great-uncle's farm, they had "three-holer" outhouses. If you had to go, it did not matter who was in there—male or female, old or young—you simply went in and joined them. In the early days in America, and most likely in biblical days as well, there was simply a one-room cabin. People took Saturday night baths while other people were in the room. There was nudity, but no lust.

When I was fifty-four I was in the hospital with a heart attack. Then nurses gave me baths. Again, there was nudity, but no lust involved.

NUDITY AROUND THE WORLD

Many people in Third World countries, who do not have indoor plumbing, bathe publicly in the

rivers. This is common in Latin America, Africa, India and on some islands in the Caribbean.

In the ancient days of Japan, there was very little heat in some of the smaller villages. In the winter, after working all day, everyone would take off their clothes and get into the public bath. They would begin to add hot rocks from a fire which heated the water. In fact, it was a challenge to see who could stay in the very longest, as the water got progressively hotter.

In the movie, "Teahouse of the August Moon," the Okinawan philosopher said that on Okinawa it was all right to see a nude lady, but it was very improper to have picture or statue of a nude lady. In America, it was okay to have picture and statue of a nude lady in a park or art museum, but was very improper to see a nude lady. This was confusing to him.

There is a tribe, which lives on the island of West Kalimantan (formerly Dutch Borneo), who go nude because of the extreme heat. They go to church this way, and there are actually pictures of them taking communion (the Lord's supper) with the entire church nude.

To most Christians in America a nude communion scene would seem terrible. However, to Christians in other parts of the world, it would seem very normal and natural. It is a very difficult task to sort out in our minds what has come from our culture, our environment and our

upbringing, and what is truly part of God's character. The thing that we need to be very careful of is not to create God in our own cultural image. We need to guard against attributing characteristics to Him based on the taboos of our society. The very worst thing is to take a false image of God that we have created and to try to impose this "god" on other cultures. Often missionaries have equated Western culture with Christianity, such as the first missionaries to Hawaii. What we need to do is to

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introduce people to the real God of the Bible. If there are any modifications to their culture that need to be made, you can believe that God will take care of it.

In this chapter, we are not talking about pornography. There are federal laws defining pornography and prohibiting it. I think those laws should be first strictly enforced and then tightened. Child pornography and abusive sex are abominations. Bestiality, a practice depicted in some pornographic magazines, is strictly forbidden in the Bible:

15 'If there is a man who lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death; you shall also kill the animal.

16 'If there is a woman who approaches any animal to mate with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.' —Leviticus 20

Let me repeat once more: God wants us to be pure and clean, morally and sexually. He does not even want lust in our hearts, much less in our activities. But we cannot jump from that to a condemnation of all nudity. It occurs today in some circumstances and has through the centuries, at times even at God's command.

In no way am I advocating nudity. I am advocating a realistic view of God, the God who commanded one of His prophets to go nude for three years. Does your God condemn all nudity?